
Roles & Responsibilities of Consultants in Developing NCCP/HCPs

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Executive Summary

The California Natural Community Conservation Planning Act and the Federal Endangered Species Act allow for the development of Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCPs) and Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) by applicants seeking permits for activities affecting threatened or endangered species. All NCCP applicants to date have developed joint NCCP/HCPs with the assistance of hired consultants. The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) recognizes that the relationship between applicant and consultant can vary from plan to plan, as can the responsibilities delegated to consultants.

Several new NCCPs have been initiated in northern California. The aim of this report is to provide guidance from CDFG on effective roles and responsibilities of consultants in the NCCP/HCP process. This objective was achieved by evaluating several NCCP/HCPs in southern California as case studies and by interviewing participants in those plans who represented a broad range of perspectives. The material presented in this report is based on the information gathered during those interviews. CDFG hopes that this report will be useful for consultants and local planning representatives new to the NCCP/HCP process.

The case studies and descriptions of successful roles played by consultants in NCCP/HCP development were obtained through interviews with 55 individuals representing private consultants, applicant jurisdictions, wildlife agencies, developers, environmentalists, attorneys and elected officials involved in conservation planning in California.

Research into the case studies presented in this report revealed that the consultant-applicant relationships that developed in southern California fell into three major categories, representing the following general models:

- * **Landowner-driven**, as exemplified by the Central-Coastal Orange County NCCP/HCP.
- * **Jurisdiction-driven**, described by the Western Riverside County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan.
- * **Team-driven**, as characterized in the development of San Diego's Multi-Species Conservation Program.

Based on the interviews, the team-driven model is preferred by the wildlife agencies and most plan participants for its collaborative approach to NCCP/HCP development. Plan participants expressed concern that consultants in the landowner-driven model may be biased by their client's interests. The jurisdiction-driven model raised concerns that strong central control can reduce the level of trust and communication among interest groups participating in plan development.

Consultants hired by applicants to assist in the development of NCCP/HCPs took on any of four types of responsibilities:

- * Technical expertise
- * Administration and organization
- * Outreach
- * Facilitation

Technical consultants can be useful in providing expertise on conservation biology, economics, land use policy and legal requirements. Successful technical consultants are characterized by:

- * Providing appropriate levels of technical expertise
- * Incorporating input from other plan participants
- * Communicating their results to people outside their discipline
- * Offering recommendations

Administrative and organizational roles can be successfully filled by consultants with experience in logistical support, budgeting, setting schedules, coordinating the consultant team, and anticipating problems before they develop. Consultants with this responsibility should have experience with the regional conservation planning process and should maintain close contact with both the applicant and the wildlife agencies.

Outreach specialists can be contracted to raise public support and get feedback from the public on NCCP/HCPs. CDFG encourages applicants to fund efforts to ensure successful community outreach as public input is a core value of the NCCP Act. Effective outreach efforts should begin early in the NCCP/HCP planning process and should continue throughout plan development and implementation to ensure continued public support and to help secure funding.

Consultants can serve as facilitators but should not serve as leaders of the NCCP/HCP process. Leadership should come from local elected officials and/or the applicant.

Successful facilitators are:

- * Solution-oriented
- * Trained in facilitation
- * Dedicated to consensus-building
- * Patient

- * Independent & objective
- * Trusted by all participants
- * Able to build trust and cooperation among participants
- * Knowledgeable of the issues
- * Trained in negotiation of win-win solutions
- * Able to unite diverse constituents
- * Empowered to engage agency decision-makers and local political leadership

Based on interview results, CDFG recommends that applicants look for consultants with local expertise who are trusted by the community to be honest and objective in their work, and who have experience in large scale, regional conservation planning. Consultants can increase their effectiveness by educating themselves about the NCCP process. Close, ongoing cooperation with CDFG will help lead to successful plan development. CDFG recommends that consultants work collaboratively as a part of the NCCP/HCP development team, seeing themselves as advocates for the plan rather than advocates for just their client.